

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE PANEL

Minutes of the **Executive Panel** of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 16 December 2024, virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 14.00hrs.

Councillor

Cllr Dylan Rees (Chair)
Cllr Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Alan Hughes
Cllr Chris Hughes
Cllr John Ifan Jones
Cllr Gareth A Roberts
Cllr Paul Rogers
Cllr Gareth Sandilands

Representing

Ynys Môn County Council
Flintshire County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Anglesey County Council
Gwynedd County Council
Wrexham County Council
Denbighshire County Council

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Stewart Forshaw
Helen MacArthur
Justin Evans
Anthony Jones
Tracey Williams
Elgan Roberts
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
George Jones
Lisa Allington

Chief Fire Officer
Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Area Manager
Head of Corporate Communications
Head of Finance and Procurement
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Atebol - Translator
Executive Assistant

1.0 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Cllr Carol Beard
Cllr Dale Selvester
Cllr Rob Triggs

Representing

Conwy County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Gwynedd Council

ABSENT

Councillor

Cllr Rondo Roberts

Representing

Wrexham County Council

2.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest to record.

3.0 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

- 3.1 There was no notice of urgent matters.
- 3.2 The Chair took this opportunity to thank all North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) colleagues for their dedication and professionalism throughout storm Darragh. In excess of 200 calls had been received by the Control Room as a direct result of the storm.

4.0 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2024

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2024 were submitted for approval.

4.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) **approve the minutes as a true and correct record of the meeting held.**

5.0 MATTERS ARISING

- 5.1 In relation to paragraph 7.4 which referenced Safecall, an independent phone line for reporting any issues of concern, it was noted that further details on its usage had been requested. Members were advised that Safecall had been introduced in June 2023 and to date, 17 individual reports had been received, of which 10 were anonymous, two were semi-anonymous and five named. Each of these calls had been fully addressed.

6.0 BUDGET SETTING 2025-26

- 6.1 ACFO MacArthur gave Members a background to the establishment of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and the involvement of MIAA in the budget setting process, and gave an overview of the high-level figures included within the report. This confirmed a gross budget requirement of £52.389m and the proposal to utilise £0.6m of reserves for non-recurring expenditure. The net levy requirement for 2025/26 would be £51.588m reflecting an increase of 7%, and fully incorporating costs of circa 2% arising from the recent increases to employer national insurance contributions. Adjusting for the national insurance contribution, the year on year increase would be 5%.
- 6.2 Elgan Roberts, Head of Finance and Procurement, then presented the Budget Setting 2025-26 paper to Members, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the current financial planning assessment to set a balanced budget for 2025/26, and to seek endorsement to confirm the indicative levy with constituent local authorities.
- 6.3 The Chair thanked the members of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group for their invaluable contribution to the budget setting process.

- 6.4 A Member asked if it was possible to source grants for environmental projects, and if there were any local grants or opportunities through partner agencies that might be available. It was also asked whether there was any indication as to the amount of the pay settlement.
- 6.5 ACFO MacArthur responded that the Service's Environment and Climate Change Manager was incredibly proactive and had already secured grants in excess of £200,000. Salix funding would be utilised in the future.
- 6.6 The Treasurer confirmed that while there was an element of risk in terms of inflation and there were never any guarantees, he felt that the estimates for the pay award were robust. Reserves would be utilised if the eventuality arose whereby the pay award exceeded the 3% accounted for. It was also noted that a separate amount had been included for the Retained Duty System (RDS) staff.

6.7 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the findings of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, including the planning assumptions being used to develop the revenue budget for 2025/26;**
- ii) note the current financial planning assessment of a budget requirement of £52.389m for 2025/26;**
- iii) note the proposal to utilise £0.601m of reserves for 2025/26; and**
- iv) endorse the communication of the draft financial levy of £51.788m from the constituent local authorities.**

7.0 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT Q2 2024-25

- 7.1 AM Anthony Jones delivered the Performance Monitoring Report Q2 2024-25 paper to Members which aimed to provide comparative data relating to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's (the Authority) 'Our 5 Principles for keeping communities safe' for the first half of the 2024/25 financial year. The report also contains commentary on activity and proposed activity associated with the principles.
- 7.2 A Member asked what the data showed with regards to malicious fire alarms, and AM Jones responded that work was being carried out with the Prevention and Protection Teams to reduce calls in this area.
- 7.3 It was further enquired as to whether there had been any prosecutions for malicious fire alarms, and responded that the initial research conducted did not indicate that any prosecutions had been made in this area.

- 7.4 One Member noted the year-on-year increase in sickness absence figures and asked what remedial measures were taken in this area.
- 7.5 ACFO MacArthur confirmed that a great deal of work was carried out with staff to enable them to continue working where possible, such as modified duties and access to Occupational Health services. The reasons for absences were multi-factorial, and 50% of the cases related to staff who were absent due to mental health reasons. Those absences that related to issues within the workplace were looked into and dealt with and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee were looking at additional mechanisms for support. However, it should also be noted that access to NHS support was particularly problematic and this had an adverse effect on sickness absence.
- 7.6 A Member requested that a comparison to both the other Welsh Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and UK-wide FRS be provided in the future in order to provide some wider context.
- 7.7 The CFO asked that Members note that as the Service was a relatively small one, it only took small numbers of staff to be absent for the percentages to appear high. The unknown outcome of the Culture Review had also had a negative impact on some staff.
- 7.8 The 61% increase in fires at HMP Berwyn was noted and it was asked what the staff within the prison were doing in order to reduce the number of fires. AM Jones responded that the success rates of the current programme were being looked at, and that the prison were trialling a scheme to replace electric or battery-operated items in an effort to prevent inmates from setting fires deliberately.

7.9 RESOLVED to:

- i) note the content of the performance monitoring report.**

8.0 TRIANNUAL BENCHMARKING OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER'S SALARY

- 8.1 This agenda item was taken after agenda item 9 and Members of the Senior Management Team were asked to leave the meeting. Gareth Owens, Clerk to the Authority, advised Members of the outcome of the triannual benchmarking of the Chief Fire Officer's (CFO) salary.

8.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) Confirm to the Authority that, through the Executive Panel, they have discharged their duty to undertake a triannual benchmarking exercise in line with the “two-track” approach for determining levels of pay for Brigade Managers as prescribed by the National Joint Council; and**
- ii) note that no changes to the salary were required.**

9.0 STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 AM Anthony Jones presented the Strategic Risk Management paper, which aimed to provide Members with an update on development to the risk management process; an outline of the draft Risk Appetite Statement; and an overview of the Authority's Strategic Risk Register.

9.2 The Chair confirmed that the Risk Register had been reviewed by himself and the Deputy Chair in the last week. Plans were also in place to improve the risk evaluation process and training would be provided in this area. It was recommended that Members also take part in this training in order to be able to better evaluate risk moving forward.

9.3 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the development of the risk management process;**
- ii) approve the draft Risk Appetite Statement; and**
- iii) note the Strategic Risk Register.**

10.0 URGENT MATTERS

10.1 The Chair took this opportunity to advise Members that, should they wish to, hybrid meetings could be moved to for Audit Committee and Executive Panel meetings; however, there would not be the facilities to carry out hybrid meetings for full Authority meetings due to restrictions on space.

10.2 It was noted that there remained a provision within the budget for Members' travel expenses.

10.3 It was agreed that meetings should remain online, by a majority vote.

Meeting closed: 14:53 hrs